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SOCIAL CONTROL. XX.

THE VICISSITUDES OF SOCIAL CONTROL.

NEVER do we find the social pressure uniform through a long period. There are times when society holds the individual as in a vise, and times when he wriggles almost from under the social knee. There are epochs when the corporate will is ascendant, and epochs when the individual is more and more. In other words, social control is in no wise fixed, but varies between strong and weak, between more and less. To describe and to account for these vicissitudes is the purpose of this chapter.

The most likely and obvious cause of such vicissitudes is *change in social need*. The function of control is to preserve that indispensable condition of common life, social order. When this order becomes harder to maintain, there is a demand for more and better control. When this order becomes easier to maintain, the ever-present demand for individual freedom and for toleration makes itself felt. The supply of social control is evoked, as it were, by the demand for it, and is adjusted to that demand.

The changes that rack the social frame, and so lead to a tightening of all the nuts and rivets in it, are nearly all connected with economic conditions. The multiplication of numbers or the decline of prosperity may make the struggle for existence more wolfish and harder to keep within bounds. New methods of production which sharpen the economic contrasts within the social group may relax the natural bonds among men, and so throw more strain on the artificial bonds. A static condition of industry may allow differences in wealth to be aggravated by accumulation through a number of generations. A bad institution—a defective system of land tenure, or inheritance, or taxation—working worse and worse as time goes on, may require stronger props to support it. Alien ethnic elements introduced among a people, one in blood and culture and hence fitted to get along smoothly, may increase the tension among them. Social

mis-selections which hinder the survival of the best breeds of men may in the course of centuries weaken character and necessitate the application of a moral truss. The common perils of war or mass migration may call for stricter corporate discipline. An influential class finding an inviting point of attachment may fasten itself upon the rest and turn parasitic. It must then guard and perpetuate this parasitic relation by a more stringent discipline.

Whatever the provoking cause may be, the increase of control is attended by a long *cortège* of social phenomena. It is impossible to restrict the movements of the social molecule without effecting a number of parallel changes. The operation of putting "starch" into church and state is at once delicate and interesting.

It might be supposed that the best way to gauge a change in the volume of control is to watch the ordinary man and see what happens to him. Is he freer or less free? Does his personal interest, bent, whim, taste, or idiosyncrasy prevail more than it did or less? But there is a better way than this.

The lessening of freedom that invariably follows an increase in control is felt, not so much by plain, inconspicuous Doe or Roe, as by the man who stands nearest to and has the most to do with those activities which are in the nature of control. In order to double the pressure on the average person it may be necessary to decuple the pressure upon those who as artists, speakers, preachers, teachers, peace officers and officials are in stations of authority or influence. They receive and transmit the impulses emanating from the elders, the notables, the mandarins, and other opinion-forming sections of society. They constitute the dial plate upon which we may read a magnified record of what the humbler folk are experiencing in the way of restraint or liberty. We have but to watch them to measure the fluctuations of social discipline.

In the religious field access of control chokes up the fountains of inspiration. The prophet is frowned upon, and the enthusiast discouraged. Dogma and ritual grow rank. The legal side of religion comes forward, while the mystic, inspirational side falls into the background. The clerical profession is less open to the

man with a "call" or "vision." From the whole mass of beliefs there splits off a body of accredited beliefs which comes to constitute "orthodoxy." Heresy is dreaded and banned. Conformity becomes a more radiant virtue, dissent a blacker sin. The layman loses his immediate touch with the Unseen. Hierarchy rears its crest. The offices of the clergy are magnified. The laity as a whole retreats before the growing insistence on the spiritual eminence of the priests. The prophet yields to the scribe, the curé to the prelate, the local cleric to the central. The pastor becomes less dependent on his flock and more dependent on the higher powers. His opinions are more looked after, and the unsound are ruthlessly routed from all posts of influence.

Art is affected in the same way as religion. In times of little control the artist works as the plowboy whistles—from sheer pleasure in free self-expression. But in times of tightening control the artist is impressed with his "responsibility." The irregular is deprecated and pursued. Canons and conventionalities multiply which he cannot evade. In increasing degree the art that is allowed to succeed is churchly, or courtly, or official, or under patronage. The censor reappears, the press is licensed, and the drama becomes a state function.

In the sphere of opinion the confidence that truth in open combat can always vanquish error declines. It is deemed needful to give a fillip to correct opinions and a handicap to the erroneous ones. The maxim that "every sober adult is responsible for his acts" is abandoned in order that the agitator may be held responsible for his diatribes and incitements. Moreover, *tendencies* are everywhere sharply looked after. Certain branches of learning are "safe," while others are "unsettling." The curriculum of studies becomes less elastic. Classicism lords it in the schools. Experiments are frowned on and a pedagogical orthodoxy arises. The direct relation of teacher to pupil and parent decays, and central authorities appear for the supervising and unifying and regulating of education. Even in the higher schools the teacher learns to value the favor of the appointing powers more than that of the men he teaches. The freedom of

teaching is restricted, and more concern is shown for the soundness of professors than for their ability.

In the field of physical coercion there is an increase in the number of lictors, bailiffs, police, and soldiers told off to catch, prod, beat, and hold fast recalcitrants, and they are brought under a stricter discipline. They are more specialized for their work, and an *esprit de corps* is carefully cultivated among them. Executive and judicial officers are appointed rather than elected, and so made answerable to their superiors rather than to the people they work among. Locally chosen persons are displaced by the nominees of a central government. For the immediate control of the local community over the officials in its midst is substituted a general and remote control of the entire people over the whole governmental machine. The military becomes more independent of the civil power, the executive more independent of the legislature, the cabinet more independent of the party that supports it, the party organization more independent of the voter. The suffrage is restricted, or else its results are repeatedly decanted and filtered by means of degrees of election.

All this does not happen by simple fiat of the social will. Certain groups of persons—executive, cabinet, the central government, the party machine, the higher clergy, the educational hierarchy, “authorities” of every kind, in short—are always striving for more power. When the need of a more stringent control makes itself felt they find the barriers to their self-aggrandizement unexpectedly giving way before them. Formerly they were held in check, while now they find encroachment strangely easy.

On the other hand there are certain deep-seated social changes which lessen the tension between man and man, and make for a milder discipline. Time assimilates juxtaposed races to one another and fits them to think and feel alike. Inventions make industry dynamic and the calcareous parts of the social organization are silently dissolved away. Changes in production or trade, lifting the base or depressing the apex of a conical society, purge out of control the element of class rule.

Prosperity, outrunning the growth of wants, softens the economic struggle. Long peace, melting down the tough masses cast in the iron mold of war, gives men the freedom of molecules in liquid.

What happens in such cases is just the opposite of that described above. Trammels of every kind—moral, legal, religious—relax, the greatest relief in this respect being enjoyed by those who handle the instruments of control. Moreover, in this movement, as in the other, the changes are not anonymous. They are brought about, not directly by the social mind, but chiefly by those groups which are most cramped and which are pressing hardest against the yoke. They are the work of artists, laymen, the lower clergy, the teaching rank and file, the intellectuals, the civilians, the commoners. These find the very stars in their courses fighting with them in their struggle for relief.

Next to *change in social need*, the vicissitudes of control are connected with *partial dissolution due to the rise and strife of classes*. Normally "society" presents itself as a congeries of lesser and greater groups, an interlinking of narrower and wider circles, each playing its part in the task of control, each spinning some of the ties that bind persons into a social tissue. The outcome of these joint operations is social order. But there are times of ill health when these natural associations cease to lend one other confirmation and support. In the bosom of society there appear *tangent groups*, each having its distinctive public opinion, creed, personal ideals, moral standards, mass suggestions, and fascinating personalities—in short, a more or less complete apparatus of control of its own. Groups of this sort are *sects*. When such sects are at variance with one another, the more absolute the control they exercise over their adherents the greater the strain on the social fabric.

The growth of fresh social tissue is in itself good. Like the budding of unicellular organisms, it is a sign of health, and when fission takes place it amounts to a kind of social reproduction. In the course of this century hundreds of such embryo societies have formed on European soil, detached themselves, migrated to roomy America, and burst into vigorous life.

But when the substance of these tangent associations so interpenetrates that they cannot secede and lead a separate existence, that is to say, when they are interdependent *social classes* with conflicting economic interests nursing each its antagonism to the other, the danger to order is very great. The sect *ethos* saps the life of the social *ethos*. In many directions control is paralyzed. Society loses in contractile power. There remains sometimes no bond but the hard outer shell of military force, which may or may not be strong enough to hold together in peace the hostile classes that have formed within it.

Now, under what conditions does society split up into jarring groups? The first condition, of course, is *sharp conflict of interest*. But this alone is not enough. There is conflict of interest between merchants and farmers, between taxpayers and tax-eaters, yet these do not form the true sects. The second condition is *great contrast of means*, resulting in extremes of misery and luxury. Especially important is this when the misery or uncertainty from which a class suffers appears to rise out of the social organization rather than to flow from nature. But this is still not enough. Such contrast does not always beget class consciousness and solidarity. The third and decisive condition is *a great inequality of opportunity*, coinciding with a great inequality of possessions.

For observe that the poor do not generate a militant ethos of their own if their *élite* are able to escape upward. In the zone of new lands that belts western civilization the doors of opportunity stand open, and the spectacle of mountainous wealth does not, of necessity, breed envy and wrath. The capable poor, the natural founders of a sect within the proletarian class, acquiesce in the *status quo*, because they hope to be possessors themselves some day. On the white man's frontier, the Far West, Alaska, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Siberia, property is easy to defend and order easy to maintain, because, in spite of economic contrast, opportunities abound. The social substance running smooth and unbroken from top to bottom, social control may be moral and mild. In older countries, however, the good places are occupied, escape from one's lot is more hopeless,

and social order implies a formidable enginery. Here the institutions of control bear the stamp of harshness, illiberalism, and oligarchy.

But even here there is a see-saw between *static* and *dynamic* epochs. In the latter, inventions subvert old fortunes and create new wealth, enterprise thrives, and the high capillarity of the social strata permits the ascent of the ablest. In the static epoch, on the other hand, opportunity is chiefly for those who hold the strategic points and own the instruments of production. Accordingly, the inner tension is not relieved.

It is in obedience to this fundamental law that the decline of public spirit, the decay of social solidarity, and the rise of the class as a moral authority are, as has often been remarked, the peculiar malady of an old society. For the society that is *old* is likely to be economically developed. This implies that its natural resources are about all taken up, and that its industry is carried on with the aid of capital which, accordingly, claims all the product beyond bare wages.

A society, then, may escape this disease of age if it becomes once more dynamic. In this century England, providing a wide field for enterprise by means of her colonies and by means of the industrial revolution which cast the riches of the world's commerce into her lap, has staved off the strife of classes, and in a democratizing time has been able to strengthen the institution of property without diminishing her heritage of freedom. But countries like Italy or Spain, lacking opportunities, have become seats of class strife, and hence of repressive institutions. To ease the upward pressure by founding colonies and by fostering industry and commerce, is the true policy for a government that feels the deck leaping beneath its feet. It is likely, then, that when capitalistic production has everywhere put its full rending strain on social tissue, the static portions of the earth will become coercive or socialistic, or both, while the dynamic lands alone will be able to remain at once individualistic, property-respecting, and free.

When class spirit has sapped social spirit and rent society in twain, the first effect is a weakening of social control and a

drifting toward disorder. Anarchy is, however, so insupportable that a very little experience of it stimulates powerfully the regulative organs of society. The more that past security has tempted property and economic organization to expand, the fiercer is the demand that the apparatus of control be reconstituted and order restored. Civil wars led the Greek cities to welcome the Roman yoke. The Social War in Rome paved the way for Cæsar and the empire. The French Revolution made Napoleon acceptable. The disorders after the close of the American Revolution provoked the establishment of a federal government. But this revived control is likely to be less suasive than the old, trusting more to the sword, and less to ideas and ideals. At times, indeed, institutions will be bathed and the recesses of the nation flooded, with the sense of a common life. There will come gusts of national feeling, when souls are as straws in the wind. But if conditions continue static, we are likely to get at the end a society like that of the later Roman empire, split into classes and devoid of public spirit and patriotism, yet enduring, because held in the massive framework of a centralized state.

Another cause of vicissitude in social control is *change in the culture and habits of a people*. The beliefs in the Unseen, religious convictions, personal ideals, canons, maxims, ceremonies, moral philosophies, and social valuations, which serve for control, are a secular growth and as such are *adapted* to collective needs. Let these be greatly deranged by fresh knowledge, new ideas, foreign influences, or novel experiences, and there will ensue during the time of convalescence an outburst of individualism. There will be a temporary emancipation from restraints and a reversion toward primitive and egoistic modes of behavior. In such cases we have what might be called *molecular dissociation*, that is, an increase of evil, crime, and strife, without any cleavage of the social mass.

With the partial paralysis of social control, whether from the fading of ideals, the decay of religion, or the degeneration of the state, there is found normally a greater energy of individual reaction against wrong. The unbinding of the ego makes

for the aggression of man on man, and hence invariably revives primitive practices of personal vengeance. Along with the individualism of the Italian Renaissance, for instance, went a demoniac energy of self-help.

Among the symptoms of triumphant egoism are the decline of patriotism and public spirit. In degenerate Italy, in dying Greece, in decrepit Egypt, the state, unable to rouse her citizens, fights her battles with *condottieri*. The cosmopolitan spirit prevails over the national spirit. Men expatriate themselves cheerfully for the sake of comfort or security. Foreign domination is endured or even welcomed. The claims of the community rank below the claims of caste. Money-getting is more attractive than public life. Politics is followed as a lucrative trade. Justice and administration become hopelessly rotten because enough good men cannot be found. The phrases and trappings of public spirit being retained after the sentiment has fled, hypocrisy infects all civic life.

Again, the family bonds are less rigid. The young are earlier freed from paternal authority. Women are emancipated without being uplifted. Enamored of self, men shrink from marital obligations. Increasing divorce shows that the family is felt to be a means of pleasure rather than a social organ. But while functional associations such as family, local community, city, and fatherland lose their hold on the individual, there is an efflorescence of associations like the religious sect, the fraternal order, the guild, the club, the social circle—all those unions, in fact, which spring from free inclination and gratify social cravings. Men unite, if at all, on a purely human basis, so that the sweetest flowers of friendship blossom in the eager atmosphere of individualism. Such times sound the heights and depths of human nature.

In these crises, when the ego has been unleashed by the decay of old regulative beliefs and the ruin of old ideals, recourse is had, whenever possible, to that amalgam of conscience and egoism, *the sense of honor*. In an era of individualism, whether in the Rome of the Stoics, the Italy of the Renaissance, the England of the Restoration, the France of this

century, or the Japan of today, the conserving forces of society conspire to whet this sentiment to the utmost keenness. In explaining why the moral solidarity of a society is now and then broken by a brief orgie of the natural man, it is necessary to observe that there is no fixed cycle of changes through which a system of social control normally passes. A phase of control is determined, not by the previous phase, but by social facts of a more primary order. Law and morality have no career of their own, but yield at every moment to the shaping pressure of other forces in social life.

If undisturbed, a people builds the knowledges, ideas, and experiences in its possession into a "world-view" which agrees with and supports its social control. They are brought into harmony with those ideas about the other world, about the ends of life, about the worth of things, and about the honorableness and dishonorableness of actions which society drills into its members. In other words, the *form* of culture, which is a trifling affair, is subdued to the purposes of regulation, which is a very important affair. Now anything that shatters this rigid confining crust that forms upon a society weakens all that control which does not depend on direct agencies like force, public opinion, etc., and thereby ushers in an era of individualism.

The accumulation of new knowledge does this. In Greece at her prime the rapid gains in a scientific apprehension of things undermined the old religious and moral views and brought on a moral crisis. Similarly, modern science has destroyed the theological systems which subordinated knowledge to regulative ideas, and has fostered among the enlightened classes of today an extraordinary freedom of spirit. This, be it remarked, is an emancipation of wholly different origin from that which has resulted from the economic conditions of the New World. Let one but compare the individualism which the free exercise of the reason has generated in the cultivated part of European society with that which has always characterized the Americans of our frontier.

The borrowing of new knowledge has the same effect as the rapid accumulation of it. That direct taking over of the

unmoralized knowledge and ideas of classical antiquity which we call the Italian Renaissance produced a brief but astounding burst of neo-pagan individualism which in its intellectual and artistic manifestations has charmed the world, but which in its moral results has excited only its horror. As the new learning filtered from Italy into northern lands it was partially mastered by the conservative forces in society, and became an intellectual ferment rather than a moral solvent. A similar effect has been wrought within the educated class in India by too immediate a taking over of western science and culture. If in Japan morals have suffered less from the same process, it is perhaps because for the support of character Japan relies on *ideals* rather than *ideas*.

The wholesale acquisition of exotic wants likewise disrupts the system of social control. Intercourse with abroad acquaints a people with foreign luxuries and implants new cravings. The sudden growth of the standard of consumption beyond the means of satisfying it sharpens the struggle for wealth, undermines old personal ideals, and subverts the social valuations of things. As tastes and appetites are more catching than the moralities that hold them in check, heavy borrowings from a foreign culture are apt to demoralize for a time the upper classes of the people. The Greek moralists deplored the rage for Asiatic luxuries which whetted the greed for gold and led Greeks to take the pay of the Persian king. Cato bewailed the sapping of Roman simplicity and virtue by insidious Greek fashions and oriental pleasures. In the sixteenth century the Italians, in the seventeenth century the Spaniards, in the eighteenth century the French, and in the nineteenth century the English, have been reproached as the corrupters of peoples. Fruitful as is the intercourse of nations, necessary as it is for the rise of universal religions and universal moral systems, it is undeniable that wholesale importations from abroad let loose the world and the flesh and tend to social decomposition. Laxity reigns until the group-soul has mastered the materials thrust upon it and out of them has built a new fabric of regulative ideas.

New experiences may likewise unbridle the ego. In times of

movement, when men break away from home and family, village and custom, in order to swarm into El Dorados, into rising marts, or into industrial towns, there is a kind of moral interregnum. They have passed from the spell of the old, and the new grouping has not yet woven its spell. The city is sometimes an amorphous, uncohering horde of this kind, and so arises the legend that life in the city can only demoralize and egoize men. But the fact is that every association is able in time to loyalize and subdue its members to corporate ends. When men come into newly formed social classes, there is likewise a demoralization until traditions are formed. Old landed gentries, for example, love to contrast their fine sense of responsibility with the raw egoism of codfish aristocracies, bonanza kings, "swagger" sets, and other *parvenu* societies.

Chronic internecine strife by subjecting men to anti-social experiences rends the social web in which they have been enmeshed. "War," says Thucydides, "which takes away the comfortable provision of daily life, is a hard master, and tends to assimilate men's characters to their conditions." Of the bloody civil wars in Greece he goes on to say :

Thus revolution gave birth to every form of wickedness in Hellas. The simplicity which is so large an element in a noble nature was laughed to scorn and disappeared. An attitude of perfidious antagonism everywhere prevailed: for there was no word binding enough nor oath terrible enough to reconcile enemies. Each man was strong only in the conviction that nothing was secure; he must look to his own safety and could not afford to trust others.¹

The Thirty Years' War and the civil commotions in southern Europe early in this century merit a similar indictment. War, when it is the shock of great groups, brings the individual more under the sway of corporate aims. But when it enters all the intimate minor groupings of men, when it tears apart and dissolves the family, the neighborhood, the church, and the social circle, then it converts the social man into the lone wolf.

The physiologist, in explaining the coördinating work of the human cerebellum, does not presume to account for those convulsive, muscular contractions that follow a bayonet thrust or a

¹ THUCYDIDES, Jowett's translation, III, chaps. 72, 73.

lightning stroke. Confining himself to states of health or of definite disease, he declines to frame a theory for such catastrophes. Likewise, the sociologist who explains the growth and principal variations of the social-equilibrating apparatus does not thereby bind himself to account for all the moral phenomena in history. Actual societies, and with them their systems of control, have been so shattered, mutilated, and deformed by war, famine, depopulation, immigration, race degeneration, and class conflict that no laws can be framed for them that shall hold true of all cases and situations.

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